

News Release

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DGS Announces Project to Repair and Preserve Monroe's Tomb

~ Yearlong restoration will stabilize 'Birdcage,' restore its original color ~

Richmond, VA –The Department of General Services today announced a yearlong project to repair and preserve James Monroe's tomb ahead of the 2016 bicentennial of his election as the nation's fifth president.

The cast iron canopy tomb, known as the "Birdcage," dates to 1859, is a National Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. The Gothic Revival structure rests on a bluff overlooking the James River in historic Hollywood Cemetery.

"The Commonwealth has tended to Monroe's Tomb for over 150 years, but we've reached a point where patches, fillers and paint are no longer sufficient," said **Richard F. Sliwoski, P.E., Director of the Department of General Services**. "This project is necessary if we are to preserve this national treasure for future generations."

This week, crews will begin disassembling the cast iron canopy and removing it from Hollywood Cemetery. The work will be done in accordance with Secretary of Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and overseen by a conservator who will document not only the location of each piece as it is disassembled but also the level of deterioration to determine whether each piece will be reused or recast. All work will be completed in the Richmond area.

Monroe's granite sarcophagus will remain in place and will be protected, cleaned and on display until the metalwork is returned. Restoration of the canopy will be completed off site and will take approximately nine months before it is brought back to Hollywood Cemetery and reassembled. The entire project is expected to be completed by September 2016.

"The Department of General Services has been consulting with us since 2012 on a restoration and treatment plan for this important National Historic Landmark," said **Julie Langan**, **Director of the Department of Historic Resources**. "Great care has been taken to carefully consider all options to ensure a sensitive and appropriate result. DGS is to be commended for its diligent and collaborative approach to this project."

Decades of repairs have left the metalwork with filler material, sheet metal patches and layers of caulking, abrasives and black paint. Original photos, including a detailed 1865 picture from the Library of Congress, show the Birdcage appears close in color to the lighter granite foundation pedestals that support the "Birdcage." Paint analysis is underway to help determine the original color so it can be restored.

The goal is to reuse as much of the original material as possible. A laser scan shows that approximately 40 percent of the cast iron will need to be recast and/or repaired, but that estimate could increase upon further inspection by the conservator. During the restoration, crews also will duplicate missing ornamentation and replace missing fasteners that either are deteriorated or were never installed during original fabrication. Conservators will thoroughly document and monitor the restoration process to preserve the original construction means and methods.

Monroe, a native Virginian, served as president from 1817-1825. His Monroe Doctrine _ the declaration in 1823 that the Western Hemisphere was closed to future colonization _ became a tenet of U.S. foreign policy. Monroe died on July 4, 1831 and was buried in New York City. As the centennial of his birth approached, Virginians lobbied state officials to build a monument in his home state where he could be reinterred. In 1859, his remains were relocated to where they now lie in the sarcophagus on display in Hollywood Cemetery.

"This is the most exciting thing that has happened to help promote the legacy of our fifth president on the eve of the bicentennial of his election," said **G. William Thomas Jr., President of the James Monroe Memorial Foundation**, which also is restoring Monroe's birthplace in Colonial Beach, Virginia. "Monroe is remembered for a number of things including the Monroe Doctrine. He's the last of our Founding Father presidents. It says so much about the Commonwealth he loved that his monument is being restored on the occasion of his service to America as he ushered in an 'Era of Good Feelings.'"

The tomb was designed by architect Albert Lybrock, who is buried in Hollywood Cemetery not far from Monroe's tomb.

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